

**To: Members of the White House Conference on Aging Policy Committee**  
**From: Todd Ringelstein, MSW, on behalf of the New Hampshire:**  
    ▪ **Mental Health and Aging Consumer Advisory Council**  
    ▪ **Coalition on Substance Abuse, Mental Health and Aging**  
**Re: White House Conference on Aging Listening Session**  
    **Sponsored by the National Coalition on Mental Health and Aging (NCMHA)**  
**Date: January 24, 2005**

In 1995, New Hampshire hosted a mini White House Conference on Aging, titled "Rural Northern New England: Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Older Adults". It was very successful in highlighting the important issues of substance abuse, mental health and aging. Here we are ten years later. Demographics are shouting the need to address these issues, as the Baby Boomers become senior citizens. I am here representing two advocacy groups who endorse and fully support the resolutions outlined by the National Coalition on Mental Health and Aging.

In New Hampshire, just this past month, there were three tragic situations involving older adults:

- 1) A brother and sister (85 and 75), who lived together in their own home, were found dead from hypothermia.
- 2) There was a murder/suicide of an elderly husband and wife whose health was failing.
- 3) A married couple, and longtime members of our Mental Health Consumer Advisory Council, is struggling to manage a household since the husband's recent stroke that now requires institutionalization in a nursing home.

It is baffling why our society seems to overlook people with mental illness and/or substance abuse issues. The research that we hear about (today's presenters) and in documents such as the Surgeons General Report on Mental Health, and the Presidents New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, shows the high prevalence of mental illness/substance abuse with older adults.

However, when it comes to being a person, who also happens to be an older adult, there is a lack of connection to housing, transportation, religion, healthcare, and the extended community. The resolutions recognize the barriers to care identified in the 2003 President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health including a fragmented service delivery system. There is a division out there that needs to come together. Choices are very limited and the likelihood of institutionalization is high - especially if you happen to be an older adult with mental illness.

Institutions are filled with older adults with mental illness/substance abuse issues including jails, nursing homes, homeless shelters and hospitals. The suicide rate for people over the age of 80 (especially white men) is the highest of any age group.

NCMHA begins each of the three resolutions with a variety of fact-based conditions for their development. The conditions cite everything from the Surgeon General's report on

Mental Health to alarming statistics on the prevalence and treatment needs of older American citizens. It is our responsibility and our duty to ensure that the resolutions become part of the fabric of the WHCoA final recommendations. Without acknowledgement of the need for effective interventions, education and development of a professional mental health workforce, and action on consumer and care giver issues, the WHCoA will have ignored a critical population in America today.

### **RESOLUTIONS:**

1. We endorse the resolutions put forward by NCMHA.
2. We recommend fully funding the initiatives outlined in the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health including:
  - Coordination of a fragmented service delivery system on the local, state and national level (housing, transportation, healthcare, and community-based supports)
  - Shifting from the institutional bias to community-based services and supports
  - Parity of funding for mental health services
  - Increasing recognition of consumer and family/caregiver voices
  - Support for implementation of specialized older adult Evidence Based Practices
  - Increased coordination and cooperation between primary health and mental health care providers
  - Increased outreach and prevention services to those who "fall through the cracks"
  - Support for a national public awareness campaign to address the issues of stigma in aging and mental health
3. We support the Positive Aging Act of 2004 introduced by Sen. Hillary Clinton (NY) and Sen. Susan Collins (ME)

The 2005 White House Conference on Aging "is intended to produce policy recommendations to guide national aging policy over the next decade". To this end, it is our expectation that the final resolution will include specific policy and funding recommendations to address the needs of older adults with mental illness and/or substance abuse issues.

In New Hampshire, we will be actively participating in the agenda setting process. We will sponsor and participate in sanctioned listening sessions and other events. Our voice will be heard. It is our wish to assure access to an affordable and comprehensive range of quality mental health and substance abuse services delivered in an age appropriate, culturally competent manner. It is vital that consumers and caregivers are represented and acknowledged as the "experts" that they are.